Rome 26th Jan.y 1874

My dear Mercé

'Twas very kind of you all writing me on my 80th. birth day & sending me all your kind wishes & I am glad to be able to answer you with the assurance of my good health & comfort — Perhaps I am even improving in strength for I can keep up for 3 & 4 hours wandering in the Roman ruins of the Palace of the Cæsars which are very extensive & very interesting — I cab it from my house & after a long stroll cab it back, not so tired as I used to be

My Claudia wrote me a long letter. Your dear letter catches with all your news, "that poor dear Tom was not so well" which grieves me as he was picking up & sent me his portrait, in which he puts a good face upon the whole matter

my eldest son Walter I expected here in Rome
but he has turned about & gone with his wife
to Egypt on account of his health, but I expect him
here middle of March please God — I am afraid
I am the cause of the change - for we had two
intensely cold days, yet the rest of the winter has
been most beautiful as it still - there were two
days rain only & on the 20th I gathered violets
in the open air - who knows but that we may
be paid off with a deluge of rain.

My son in law C. Newton has just arrived here
on his way to London

Now I hope to hear that you are passing
the Winter well & not suffering from cold &
hope that my good boy Arthur remembers to
pay you punctually

Claudia wrote me that her 3 daughters
are learning Greek & she begs me to write a
poem for them, & compose a trio for it, can I do
this? I doubt, but I'll make the attempt

Rome is changing by means of new buildings & by thousands of Italians coming to live here but for the poor people I'm afraid that it is all for the worse

This moment a telegram has come that Mr Gladstone has put off the meeting of Parliament to 5th of March & that he has saved for the nation 5 millions – no doubt he has some fine plan in secret preparing for the good of the nation – the is here thought to be the greatest minister of this century

My painting is going on but only so so, for I am intolerably idle & cannot call up my old spirits

I have at last the chance of placing my large picture of the Holy Sepulchre in the new American Church now building, wherein it will form the end or tribune

You'd be amused to see what quietness & repose Life sunk down into – how all my vanity is quenched & how I am forgotten!!

excepts

in this I fare better than my brother artists for they take to brandy & strong drinks which I never have the English artists who come here now are of a very inferior kind & you can have no idea how I have toiled to get up to my present position & to place my dear children as they are!!

I'll send you a Photo of Betta, she is not so old but of middle age & she has been with me 8 years - She is a most excellent servant, & knows my ways & is really honest, her work is much less as the Doctors servant does the hard work, the 2 ladies also lend a hand in the kitchen Sig.a Vittoria is an excellent cook - Betta is worth her weight in gold also she is a very fat woman

I am delighted at the good news you tell me of dear Ellen that she has recovered her health & spirits - My illustrious fr. Mr Gladstone has lost the gov.t & I dont know how - What it is a dangerous thing to be doing good I have had great experience - I read of two good pictures by my dear boy Arthur - My Walter is gone to Cairo & may meet the Andersons, my love to all

Your loving brother Joe